

The Mysterious Ways of Wang Foo. *By Sidney C. Partridge.*

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"GENTLEMEN, you can take my word for it, the Chinese are the very best and easiest people in the world to trade with if you only understand them and are willing to do an honest business with them," remarked Wilson Gregg of the Great Western Trading Company to an interested group of visitors sipping their afternoon tea on the verandah of the Hong-kong Hotel. "I've been dealing with them off and on for over twenty years and I know what I am talking about. You've got to have a first-class article to start with, and the goods must always be up to the samples, for if they once suspect that you are lowering your standard you are gone. Then you've got to have a nice-sounding chop or trade mark that they can easily pronounce and that has some good luck in it to gratify their little superstitions, and, lastly, you have got to have a fair fixed price that you never under any circumstances vary from, and the trade and goodwill of the Chinese are yours. Now, Dr. Burroughs, you've lived a long time among them and speak their lingo and all that and know them even better than I do," he said, turning to the mission surgeon, who had just joined the party. "You'll bear me out in this statement, I am sure, won't you?"

"With pleasure, Mr. Gregg," replied the surgeon; "you have stated the case very accurately, and I congratulate you upon your grasp of the situation. Unfortunately, a great many European and American merchants fail to understand these points in the Chinese nature, and consequently they allow the trade to slip right through their hands. In the years that I have been here I could give you a long list of the firms from abroad who have come out here and flourished for a little while and then gradually their custom has fallen off and passed into the hands of others, and they have finally given up in disgust and gone home."

"They've developed a very bitter feeling against the natives and say it is impossible for any decent European to deal with them, and all that, when all the time it was simply their own fault and no one else's. If they had really understood the nature of their customers they could not only have kept the trade, but have had it grow larger every year. However, this is a very large subject, this matter of international trade, and if I should go into it to any extent I am afraid I should keep you gentlemen here all the rest of the day."

"You spoke of the trade mark or 'chop,' Mr. Gregg," interrupted one of the tourist group. "I have heard it said that this is really the all-important point with the Chinese and that a wisely chosen and popular chop really goes further with them than even the quality of the goods. Have you found that this is so?"

"Well, I should hardly say that it was the most important thing, but it certainly goes a very long way with them toward selling the goods, doesn't it, Dr. Burroughs?"

"It most certainly does. But, as I said a moment ago, this is a very large subject—it would fill a volume in itself—and the full story of it has never yet been written for Europeans. I may say, however, as an indication of the value that they place upon it, that a large Chinese firm will spend days and weeks of time and many hundreds of dollars, if necessary, in selecting just the right chop for an article before placing it on the market."

"It practically corresponds, then, to careful and elaborate advertising in our countries, doesn't it?"

"Yes, and it practically takes the place of public advertising, which the Chinese do not care very much about. Let me give you just one little illustration of the value of a name in a case that came under my own observation a few years ago. The lamp trade, as you all know, is one of the most important in this country, and with the lamps, of course, there goes a great importation of chimneys and globes. There is naturally not very much variety in the matter of the chimneys inside, but there is an endless variety of choice in the outside globes, because these, in the native mind, correspond to the glazed paper coverings of their old-fashioned lanterns, about which they are very particular. Now there happened to be

two English dealers in glassware in the very same block on Queen's road, and both of them filled their windows and showcases with the handsomest patterns of lamps and shades. At first the tide of native customers seemed to flow about evenly into the two establishments, but gradually the gentleman on the left, whom we will call 'Brown,' found his list of customers growing shorter and shorter, while his neighbor and rival, whom we may call 'Jones,' rubbed his hands in delight at the sight of the constantly increasing number of his patrons. Their stock in trade was so nearly alike and the arrangement of the goods in their windows so very similar that the European mind was at a loss to account for the shifting of the tide, especially as the prices were identically the same."

"What, then, was the secret?" inquired our tourist on behalf of a much interested and listening circle. "Why, it was simply this," replied the surgeon with a smile: "Brown was content to have the large Chinese sign in the window simply say in its golden characters, 'Crystal Globes,' while Jones, who had been wise and crafty enough to consult an old missionary on the subject, advertised his wares by the striking title of 'Dragon Bubbles.'"

"Well, what of that? What could the difference signify? Why should they run after bubbles rather than crystals? Is it simply because they are human like the rest of us and, as the poets and philosophers tell us, we all spend our lives really in chasing bubbles?"

"Oh, no, that's the western idea—not, the eastern—and you mustn't make the popular mistake of putting occidental thought and reason into the oriental brain, for that's what causes three-quarters of all the trouble between them. The difference lies just here: A globe of crystal or glass is to the Chinese mind simply a piece of inanimate and material nature, a cold, dead and lifeless thing like the rock or sand from which it comes—beautiful and attractive, but not alive or capable of communicating life or any attendant blessing to mankind. On the other hand, the bubble formed from the foam in the mouth of the dragon—himself the king of nature and embodiment of all its forms of life—is not only a beautiful and living thing in itself, but conveys to its fortunate possessor the vivifying qualities of all the animal kingdom. So you see, to have hanging from the ceiling a lamp-globe that bears the name of the 'dragon bubble' would convey infinitely more good luck to a native home than all the 'crystal globes' in the world!"

"Remarkably interesting and clever story, that!" exclaimed Maj. Perkins from Bombay, as he laid down his cheroot and drew out of his pocket a notebook. "I'll just jot it down here at once before I forget it. By Jove! You can learn something new here every day, just as you can in India, don't you know. 'Dragon Bubbles.' Very good! Very good! I'll not forget that in many a day, not I. And now, gentlemen, as it's a very warm afternoon, I suggest we all have a little liquid refreshments and imagine we see genuine dragon bubbles sparkling on the soda, eh?"

He rang the bell for the boy, but before giving him the order for the liquids he thought he would just get



BEFORE THE EXCITED PRIEST COULD STOP HIM HE FLOODED THE ROOM WITH A TORCHLIKE GLARE.

his view on the subject, and so he said: "Boy, you can savvee dragon bubble?"

"Yes, my can savvee."

"Talkee him b'lorigee velly good joss, eh?"

"Chineeman talkee him number one good joss."

"You think Hong Kong side can catchee?"

"S'pose some piecee joss-house makee sell glasse, look see all samee. Chineeman he buy, no can get house fire, no can get sick gettee plenty lich, can catchee cash buy licee."

"General protection all around, eh?"

"My savvee joss-man he talkee so fashion—some piecee man talkee all same fool pidgin."

"Well, hurry up the sodas now, boy, and have them cold and sparkling."

After the ever-popular and refreshing beverage of the far east we little party broke up and wandered off toward the tennis club and the boathouse, the two favorite cooling-off spots of the colony. They had not noticed at all a quiet Chinese gentleman now had sat in a large wicker-work chair just beyond them on the verandah, and who, although apparently deeply absorbed in the mysterious contents of a native volume, had been a most interested listener to all their conversation. After the last one had departed he rang the bell for the boy, and addressing him in his native tongue, said: "At what temple on the island are they selling the dragon bubbles now?"

"The elder-born asketh well, but the ignorant little servant knoweth not."

"You told the foreigner just now that you knew, for I distinctly heard you."

"The honorable elder-born must have misunderstood the question of the ocean-man."

"Not at all; I understood it perfectly."

"Great and august is the learning of the elder-born that he understands the language of the ocean-man so easily."

"Waste not thy flowery terms on me, nor scatter jade-stone compliments in the pathway of the Sages' humblest scholar," replied Wang Foo, the famous Man of Mystery, as he took the boy into the furthest quiet corner of the veranda and, opening out the Japanese screen that stood there, concealed them both from the eyes and ears of all observers. He seized him by both wrists and, holding him with the grip of a vise, looked straight into his eyes and said: "Ah Ling, I know exactly who you

are. You are from Pow Tai village across the bay, for your accent tells it. The information that I want is for the Mandarins. You know the native proverb well: 'Keep out of the clutches of the law!' Now tell me at once what I want to know, or before the moon is three days older the wooden cangue will be about thy neck." He tightened his grasp on the wrists of the trembling Ah Ling, who now was wriggling like an eel—

"You know it, tell me quick!"

"I do not know; I do not—"

"Liar! You do. Which temple is it? Quick or I will—"

The houseboy fell upon his knees, gasping as he did so: "Yuek Tai Tai, Yuek Tai Tai" (the Moon Goddess, the Moon Goddess). But spare me, O merciful master, for the vengeance of the Queen of the Night follows those who reveal her secrets."

"You are protected on condition of absolute silence until we meet again."

Meanwhile Mr. and Mrs. Goodwin, the parents, were driven almost to distraction by the news of the loss of the child and the conjuring up of every terrible suspicion regarding the disposing of him. The frantic mother kept crying out: "They will kill him! They will kill him! My darling boy, they will drown him, they will burn him! I shall never see him again!" But her condition, heart-broken as it was, was really no more pitiable than that of the poor Chinese amah, who, rolling on the nursery floor in paroxysms of uncontrollable grief, kept shrieking: "Take me! Take me! Stab me, kill me, eat me if you wish, but bring back my boy." There was no more faithful or devoted native servant in the entire community, and it was no exaggeration to say—and the oldest residents well knew it to be true—that she would willingly have given her life to have saved the child, for such things have actually happened in the history of European life in the far eastern world.

Of course a large reward was immediately offered for the apprehension of the thieves and the return of the child. Sir Wayne-Evington, the Governor of Hongkong, called personally with Lady Evington at the Goodwin residence and after tendering his sympathy and promising every assistance on the part of the authorities, headed the subscription list with a very handsome sum, which was multiplied a great many times by the amounts offered by the various societies and organizations in the colony. It was remarkable to see how the tragic event drew out the sympathy of the entire populace, without any distinction of race, creed or nationality. The consuls of all the different countries, officers of the garrison and of the naval and mercantile marine, the bishop and all the various missionaries, the heads of the Mohammedan and Parsee guilds, either called in person or sent their cards and kindest inquiries. It surely was the little "touch of nature that makes the whole world kin." But among all those who expressed their horror at the occurrence and hastened to tender their sympathy and assurances of help none surpassed the Chinese themselves. The consul came in person with all his staff, and he was followed by the heads of the various guilds and firms and leading citizens of the native community, who vied with each other in expressing their detestation of the crime and requested the privilege of being allowed to subscribe to the reward.

Among the first of the red cards to be presented by a native servant at the Goodwin door was that of Wang Foo, the detective, who accompanied it by a personal note of assurance that he would leave no stone unturned in his efforts to co-operate with the authorities and to bring the villains to justice, and begging Mr. and Mrs. Goodwin—which many others had forgotten to do—not to give up hope of securing the child's return until every effort had been exhausted. In accordance with the foregoing promise, he called at once at the department of police and on being ushered into Inspector Wallace's private office greeted him with: "Mr. Inspector, this is the time when I have anticipated you. My general custom, as you know, is to wait till the department sends for me and requests my services, but this is a case that touches the whole community so vitally—and one, I may say, in which we all feel that we cannot help too willingly or too promptly—that I have taken the liberty of coming down here at once to offer my services to the authorities. In other words, as you say in England, 'I am yours to command'."

"Well, Mr. Wang, you certainly were never a more welcome visitor at this office. Please take a seat and help yourself to a cheroot out of the new box there." The inspector rose and closed the doors and windows—his customary precaution when anything of a specially private nature was to be discussed in the office. He then continued: "You have read the account in the papers; now, what is your theory? Is it a case of kidnapping or of simple 'disappearance' as the reports call it? Where is the little chap and who spirited him away? What is your solution?"

Wang Foo removed his round Chinese cap and laid it on the table (this he would not have done in a Chinese presence, but he sometimes allowed himself what he called his "European privilege" when he was alone with a friend from the west); it seemed to relieve the pressure on the brain and enabled him to pass his right hand two or three times across his brow as if to rub away the

A day or two after the scene between Wang Foo and the hotel boy the whole community of Hong Kong was thrown into a state of the most intense excitement by the report that a European child had been kidnapped! Little Bennie Goodwin, the four-year-old child of Mr. and Mrs. Goodwin of Victoria Terrace, had disappeared from the care of his amah while playing with some other European children in Cricket Ground Park, and not a trace of him could be found. They were too far away from the water's edge for him to have fallen into the harbor, and as it was only a minute or two before he was missed he could not have wandered down any of the neighboring streets. The police, who were diligently assisted in their search by the naval and military authorities—to say nothing of the scores of civilians who hurried to offer their services to the department—were therefore reluctantly driven to the conclusion that the child had wandered away for a moment into the roadway and there had been suddenly seized and thrown into some passing jinrikisha or sedan chair by the kidnapers, and was now being concealed in some outlying section of the colony and probably held for a ransom.